terrorism and security briefing. Some weapons and explosives training was also given.

There were many technically qualified candidates, but finding those willing to deploy for a projected 90-120 days in Iraq was challenging. Simply obtaining the travel documents, medical clearances and command approval for travel was a complex process. Nonetheless, we quickly had a cadre of field engineers ready to travel.

The first four engineers deployed early in 2004 and were quickly followed by four others. To date, the following engineers have deployed to Iraq: Ken Crawley, Dennis Ehney, Bill Collins, Randy Kann, Ron Chambers, Sam Caughey, Fred Bellamy and Andrew Poe. Will Terrell and Ralph DeMott are now in Iraq.

On the ground in Iraq

I took off for Baghdad April 1, 2004, on a commercial flight from Charleston to Kuwait for three additional days of training and in-processing. At 0400 on the 5th, I was off to Baghdad but this time on a military C-130, with every seat filled. The most interesting part of the flight was the descent into Baghdad International Airport. The pilot rolled the plane in a 90-degree corkscrew dive to keep the plane inside controlled, safe airspace.

Even though it's only five miles from the airport to the Green Zone, it's probably the most dangerous road in Baghdad, and takes about 30 minutes of travel time because of numerous security checkpoints. To build the network, I had to travel between Al Faw Palace on one side of the Green Zone and the motor pool on the other with occasional trips outside the Green Zone to Regional Embassy Offices. Typically, project planning and staff meetings were held in the palace with vehicle installations completed in the motor pool. Base station installations were done in a variety of U.S. government buildings throughout Iraq.

Installing the HF system involved heavy manual labor — a lot of it. Ordinarily, I was on the roof of a building trying to erect a 30-foot mast with a 65-foot antenna connected to it. Difficult under any circumstances, but in 130-degree heat and a blistering desert wind, it was a challenge. Not only were installations physically taxing, they were in hostile areas, and it was dangerous being exposed on top of the roof! Luckily, part of the installation process was working inside air conditioned buildings to set up, configure and test equipment with the other sites.

Equipment installations were required in each major city in Iraq, so safe transportation was a chief concern. Some cities could only be reached by military air and others by fully armored, escorted vehicles. Whatever the mode, getting transportation scheduled required early planning and the flexibility to travel on short notice. Any trip outside the Green Zone required wearing a helmet and body armor.

We successfully managed logistics issues and resolved technical and engineering questions across eight different time zones, but unscheduled downtime was a recurring problem. Despite our best efforts to efficiently schedule transportation, we could spend hours waiting for transportation to the next installation.

Ultimately, I spent six months in Iraq and learned some valuable lessons. On a personal level, I found that I could survive and succeed in a hostile and constantly changing environment.

On a professional level, I discovered the benefits of careful pre-deployment planning and real-time communications. In large part, the success of the project can be attributed to the support we received from the Special Communications Branch and DISA personnel in Iraq and Washington, D.C.

The initial push to activate the network was accomplished prior to June 30, 2004, when the Coalition Provisional Authority was dissolved and sovereignty returned to Iraq. While we continue to support the program, network ownership and operational control have transferred to the State Department.

Andrew Poe is a computer scientist and engineer in the SSC Charleston Special Communications Branch.

Richard Dandridge, Errol Matthews, Kent Gramke and John Chap of SSC Charleston assisted with this article. CHIPS

FORCEnet

Engineering Conference

June 6 - 8, 2006

Norfolk, Va.

FORCEnet's architectural construct will transcend organizational boundaries and will integrate the widest possible collection of joint and coalition platforms, weapons and combat and control systems. Developing FORCEnet will require comprehensive lines of communications between U.S. military services, U.S. government agencies and coalition partners.

As such, the theme for the third FORCEnet Engineering Conference, sponsored by the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command, will focus on "joint and coalition alignment."

The conference is designed to promote a collaborative environment for key engineering personnel in the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force, U.S. Joint Forces Command, Coast Guard, U.S. agencies and coalition communities to address FORCEnet related issues, processes, procedures and business rules.

The tentative dates and location for the FORCEnet Engineering Conference are June 6– 8, 2006 in Norfolk, Va., at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott.

For information visit the FORCEnet Engineering Conference Web site at http://www.nconfs.com/FnEngineeringConference/index.htm/. CHIPS